

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5621

---

**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Children & Family Services

**Title:** An act relating to preschool or nursery schools.

**Brief Description:** Requiring the superintendent of public instruction to adopt standards for voluntary certification of preschools.

**Sponsors:** Senators McAuliffe, Weinstein, Pridemore, Rockefeller, Kohl-Welles and Rasmussen.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Children & Family Services: 3/24/05, 3/30/05 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Bill**  
**(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Requires the Washington Early Learning Council to develop standards and procedures for the voluntary certification of preschools.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Darneille, Dickerson and Pettigrew.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Hinkle, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dunn and Haler.

**Staff:** Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

**Background:**

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is required to license agencies providing care for children outside of their homes as identified by state law. The purpose of this licensing requirement is to assure the users of those agencies, their parents, the community at large, and the agencies themselves that adequate minimum standards are maintained by all agencies caring for children in order to safeguard the health, safety, and well-being of those children receiving care.

State law specifically exempts nursery schools or kindergartens, which are engaged primarily in educational work with preschool children and in which no child is enrolled on a regular basis for more than four hours per day, from the licensing requirement.

State law requires the State Board of Education to approve private schools carrying out a program for any or all of the grades kindergarten through 12, except that no private school may be approved that operates a kindergarten program only.

Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill No. 1152 of 2005 establishes the Washington Early Learning Council (Council) in the Office of the Governor for the purpose of providing vision, leadership, and direction to the improvement, realignment, and expansion of early learning programs and services for children birth to 5 years of age in order to better meet the early learning needs of children and their families.

---

### **Summary of Amended Bill:**

The Council is required to develop standards and procedures for the voluntary certification of public and nonpublic preschool child development and educational programs. At a minimum, the standards should outline essential components, including, but not limited to, the following categories:

- school-home relationships;
- class size and teacher-student ratios;
- standards for teachers and staff;
- specification of pedagogical goals, content, and methods, consistent with early learning development benchmarks developed in Washington; and
- methods for monitoring quality.

The Council is required to develop strategies to encourage preschool programs to apply for certification.

The Council is required to make recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature concerning implementation of the developed standards and procedures for the voluntary certification of public and nonpublic preschool child development and educational programs, which must include the following:

- identification of an appropriate state agency to implement the standards and procedures for voluntary certification;
- a mechanism for making the list of certified preschool programs widely available to the public; and
- a mechanism for any program that meets the definition in state law of a nursery school or kindergarten, and is thereby exempt from licensing by the DSHS under state law, to annually file its business name, name of the business owner, address, and phone number with the state.

### **Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The Council, rather than the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Superintendent), is required to develop standards and procedures for the voluntary certification of public and nonpublic preschool child development and educational programs, as well as strategies to encourage preschool programs to apply for certification.

The Council is required to make recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature concerning implementation of the developed standards and procedures for the voluntary certification of public and nonpublic preschool child development and educational programs, which must include the following:

- identification of an appropriate state agency to implement the standards and procedures for voluntary certification;
- a mechanism for making the list of certified preschool programs widely available to the public; and
- a mechanism for any program that meets the definition in state law of a nursery school or kindergarten, and is thereby exempt from licensing by the DSHS under state law, to annually file its business name, name of the business owner, address, and phone number with the state.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is no longer required to post a list of certified preschool programs on its web site. Nursery schools and kindergartens are no longer required to annually file their business name, name of the business owner, address, and phone number with the Superintendent.

---

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date of Amended Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** (Original bill) Efforts to create a registration and certification system for preschools and kindergartens that are currently not eligible for certification or registration by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction or any other government agency are supported. Such a system would provide information to help parents who are looking for a preschool program to find and select a program that best meets the needs of their children. Standards should be adopted to ensure healthy, safe, stimulating environments that adequately prepare children for success in school. We currently do not have any information about how many of these types of unregulated programs are out there and how many children are in them, let alone about the safety or the quality of the programs. A conservative estimate was made in 1999 that there might have been 1,200 to 1,300 of these preschool programs serving 47,000 children. Regulation of preschools and kindergartens by two separate state agencies should be avoided. The work of developing these standards and regulations should be done within the context of other early learning work being done in our state or that will be being done, such as the work of the Early Learning Council, if created.

Preschool teachers are very anxious to have something in place so that they will know what it is that they really need to do in order to get their children in preschool ready to go to kindergarten. There is a distinct advantage for a child who goes to a preschool that has more readiness to learn type of activities. Children who do not have that are years behind, and the achievement gap actually starts there. The voluntary certification provides an opportunity for parents to see which preschools are aligned with what we see children need to know and be able to do to go to kindergarten. As our children move through the system, we have to start thinking of it not in silos anymore, separating early learning, K-12, and higher education. Wherever a child is, we have to be sure that they are lined up with what we think they have to know and be able to do at that point in their life. We should have preschool standards that articulate into the K-12 standards that then articulate into higher education. This bill is the beginning of that.

(With concerns) It is time that preschools in our state have some regulation and oversight. There is so much overlap with the development of the Early Learning Council. This is a good first step, but certification of preschools should be mandatory. Early learning should be a part of our state education agency. There needs to be careful attention to language, both in definitions of who a preschooler is and who a kindergarten child is. It is very exciting that so much attention is being given to early learning. Representatives of the different early learning models need to be brought to the table, so that everyone can continue to do their good work.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; and Agda Burchard, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children and The Collaborative.

(With concerns) Patricia Christensen, Montessori Country School.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.